

GEAR UP Kentucky 2000-2005

Status Report

Abstract

GEAR UP Kentucky 2000 is a partnership of 50 schools and more than 25 postsecondary education institutions and community organizations focused on increasing college participation by low-income students. The program has been supported by a five-year, \$10 million GEAR UP state grant awarded in September 2000 to the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education. All of the federal funds are matched by an equal amount in each year of funding.

In September 2005, the program concluded its fifth and final year of federal funding. The Council will not receive new federal funds from the U.S Department of Education for FY06 activities. However, GEAR UP Kentucky staff will continue working with schools and program partners to transition activities that can be readily sustained when all external funding is discontinued.

Audience

GEAR UP Kentucky enrolled approximately 3,900 students in its initial year and continued adding a new cohort of seventh grade students each year. The program currently serves more than 18,000 students in grades 8 through 12. Program services focus on low-income

students—student eligibility is based on the percent of students enrolled in a school that are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch. All students in a cohort receive services. In GEAR UP Kentucky schools, nearly 65 percent of all students are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch; 20 percent of GEAR UP Kentucky schools are at 50percent free and reduced-price lunch eligibility; 62 percent are at 51-75 percent free and reduced-price lunch eligibility; and 18 percent are at 76-100 percent free and reduced-price lunch eligibility.

Throughout the duration of the project, GEAR UP Kentucky has enrolled an almost equal proportion of male students as females and nearly twice the percent of African American students in the general population of the state (See Figure 2). Less than two percent of all students are identified as *Limited English Proficient* which also reflects the lower enrollment of Latino

students in GEAR UP Kentucky schools. Thirteen percent of students in the program have *Individualized Education Plans* (IEP) pointing to a significant percent of students in GEAR UP Kentucky schools that were identified with special learning needs.

Figure 1

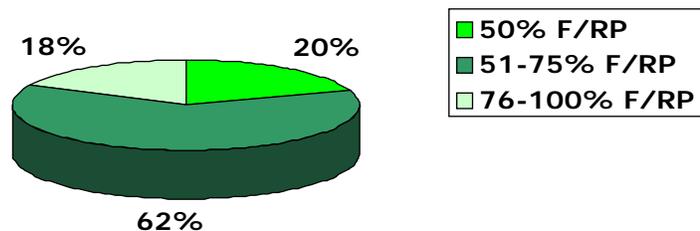
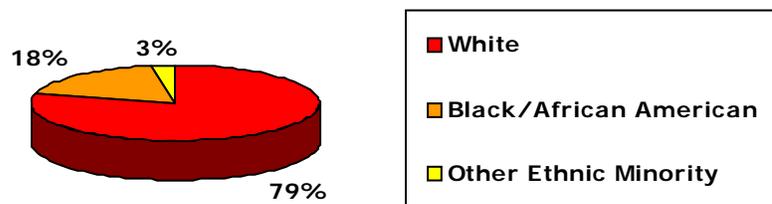


Figure 2



Increasing Academic Readiness

The goals of GEAR UP Kentucky are to ensure that more Kentuckians are ready for college and are knowledgeable about the affordability of postsecondary education. The program laid the foundation for early intervention through the services and activities it provided, such as college financial aid planning workshops and special classes in mathematics, science or reading. Some students received extra help in tutoring and studying for tests such as the ACT; and their parents have been engaged in activities and discussions to teach them about the academic requirements for college. Early indications are that the program is making steady progress toward improved academic achievement. Tables 1 and 2 on the following pages show just how quickly schools are moving toward higher academic performance.

Academic Rigor

The total number of GEAR UP Kentucky students taking algebra in middle school has increased during the five-year period and although there are still insufficient students taking or ready to succeed in algebra by the ninth grade, the number has grown significantly. In 2003, less than one thousand Middle School students took algebra or advanced mathematics subjects, but by 2005 that number had more than doubled. In overall performance, GEAR UP Kentucky students still lag behind their peers in the state and while the rate of change in reducing low academic achievement exceeds that of the state average, the rate of change in increasing high academic performance is lower in science and mathematics in GEAR UP Kentucky schools.

Like other states, Kentucky identified measures to mark the program's progress and monitor ongoing improvements. The GEAR UP Kentucky objectives for increasing rigor and enriching student learning are related to state requirements for improved school performance, which is measured by student performance on CATS at these levels: *Novice*, *Apprentice*, *Proficient* and *Distinguished*. Performance at these levels is specific to the subject and grade being assessed but overall, the objective is to decrease the percentage of students at the novice level and to increase the percentage of students at the proficient and distinguished levels.

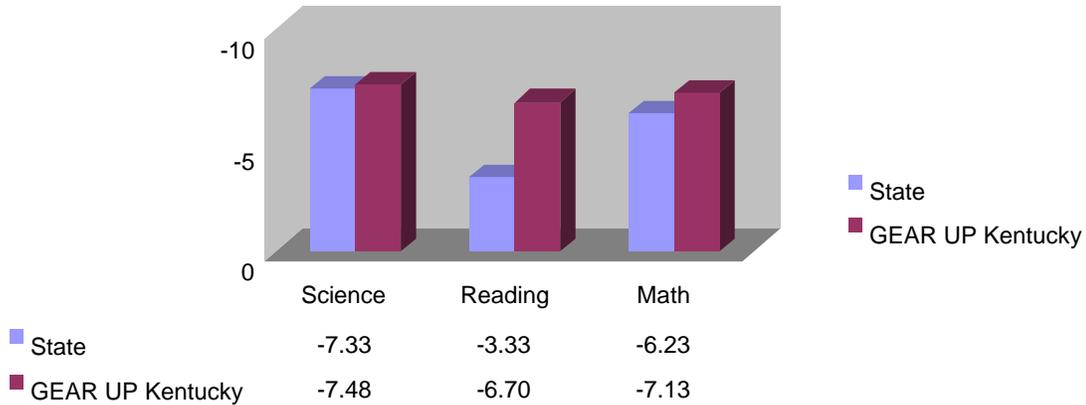
Table 1 charts the rate of change in GEAR UP Kentucky schools in comparison to the state during the same time period. On average, the rate of change for GEAR UP Kentucky schools outpaces that of the state in reducing the number of students performing at the novice (basic) level. In addition, in one subject area, GEAR UP Kentucky students are advancing faster toward proficient and distinguished levels of performance than the state overall.

Reducing Novice Level Performance

GEAR UP Kentucky schools have decreased student performance at the novice level in science, reading, and mathematics at a faster rate than the state overall. The most significant reduction was in reading, with a 6.7 percent decrease compared with the state's 3.33 decrease rate in the same period.

Table 1
Rate of Change 2000-04
At NOVICE Performance Level

Percent Change: State vs. GEAR UP Kentucky



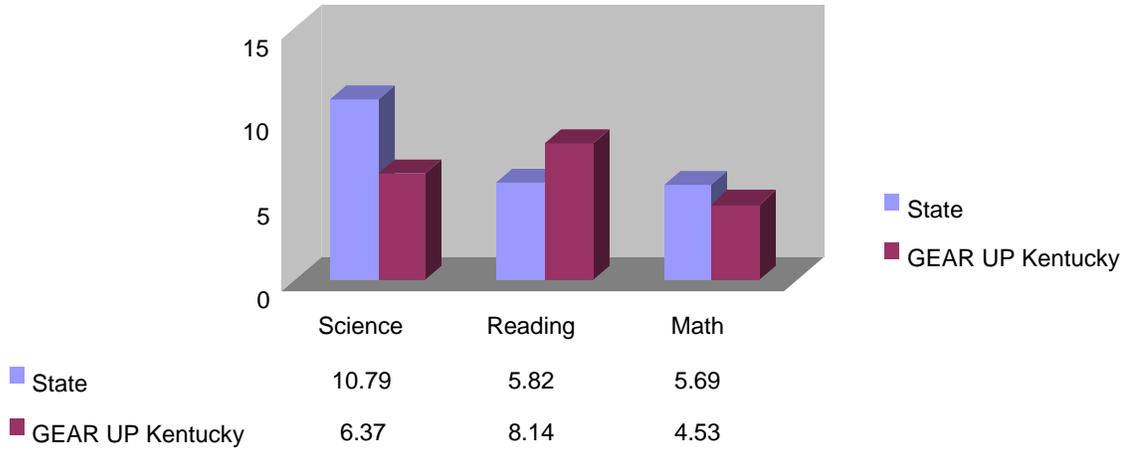
- Science: 2 percent greater than state average
- Reading: twice as fast as the state average
- Mathematics: 14.4 percent greater than the state average

Increasing Proficient and Distinguished Levels of Performance

Kentucky’s reform goals require that all students perform at the proficient level by 2014, while the GEAR UP Kentucky goal is to ensure students are college-ready. They are compatible goals and the partnerships established by the program offer many opportunities to equip students with the right skills and attitudes to succeed in college. During the period 2000-04, the rate of change at GEAR UP Kentucky schools for students performing at the proficient and distinguished levels in reading was greater than that of the state overall. However, in science and mathematics, the state’s rate of change exceeded the rate of change in GEAR UP Kentucky schools. (See Table 2).

Table 2
Rate of Change 2000-04
PROFICIENT and DISTINGUISHED Performance Levels

Percent Change: State vs. GEAR UP Kentucky



- Science: the rate of change in GEAR UP Kentucky schools was nearly 40 percent lower than the average rate of change for the state
- Mathematics: the rate of change in GEAR UP Kentucky schools was 20 percent lower than the average rate of change for the state

The impact of the GEAR UP program in the participating schools is evident in a variety of ways. The program has contributed to changes in attitudes and knowledge of students, parents, and school personnel toward the importance of postsecondary education. Nevertheless, academic preparation is the only guarantee that students will succeed at postsecondary institutions and high performance jobs.

The performance of GEAR UP Kentucky students has improved during the five-year grant period, but overall academic achievement still lags behind the state’s performance average in key subject areas. Nevertheless, early results in the program suggest that if schools continue on this trajectory of increasing academic achievement, students that remain in the pipeline are more likely to pursue postsecondary education ready to succeed. GEAR UP Kentucky schools, therefore, must continue to nurture this college-going culture by providing adequate instruction in requisite college preparatory coursework, sound academic guidance, and support for students to increase academic rigor.